

# 'David v Goliath' struggle for Waihi

Waihi residents worried by new plans to drill under their town for gold and silver vow a last-ditch battle against a mining giant. Angela Cuming reports.

In a major development for Waihi, Newmont has been given approval to drill down under the existing Martha Mine in the centre of the Coromandel town.

The tunnelling would run 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

But although the company says the work will keep locals employed beyond the planned closure of the Martha in two years, it is the last straw for some fed-up residents, who say the \$55 million round-the-clock operation will add sleep deprivation to their list of mining-related concerns.

A residents group, the Distressed Residents Action Team (DRAT), will today hold a public meeting to draw up a battle plan before the February 27 deadline to lodge an objection or appeal in the Environment Court.

DRAT spokeswoman Collette Spalding said Waihi residents were ready for a fight.

"There is going to be an awful lot of people affected by this and we are going to use the meeting to work out the best method to get Newmont to address our concerns," she said.

"There is a real and genuine fear that all the increase of noise, which will be all night, every night, will have a serious impact on people's mental health."

"During the day you expect noise but a lot of us moved here because of the peace and quiet at night and now Newmont is going to shatter that."

"Noise is a recognised health hazard

## NEWMONT GOLD RUSH

- Gold and silver targeted
- About 2.5km of zig-zag tunnel under the western side of the pit.
- Tunnel size: 5m high by 5m wide
- Drilling 24 hours a day, seven days a week

and we would rather live in peace than have Newmont's financial compensation."

Newmont's external affairs manager, Sefton Darby, said the company had not been invited to the meeting, but said there was "absolutely no doubt" there were residents not happy with the plans. "[But] it is our job to make sure Newmont offers up economic benefits for the town that outweigh those concerns," Mr Darby said.

About 700 people depend on mining-related jobs in the community.

A council-commissioned survey last year showed 83 per cent of the community "appreciated and understood" the value and jobs Newmont created and the economic benefits to the town, he said.

Green Party MP Catherine Delahunty was to speak at today's meeting and said the residents faced something "that is much bigger than the biggest David and Goliath battle".

"Our concern is the rights of the

people, they are the ones who can best identify what they are going through and what will happen if mining is allowed 24 hours a day," she said.

"They need support when they participate in complex legal issues such as lodging an objection in the Environment Court."

"Their stories need to be heard

because they can only see their lives getting worse. "Newmont need to consider what it is like to live in a town with 24-hour mining."

The group had pushed for Newmont to buy any property within mine licence zones, but that looks increasingly unlikely.

Hauraki District Mayor John Tregida

said the plans for the mine were covered by a variation to Newmont's existing mining licence and were permitted under the Crown Minerals Act.

"The law allows it, whether we agree with it or not," he said.

Newmont will next turn its attention to the controversial \$1 billion Correnso underground mining project.

An application for that will be lodged at the end of the month. If approved, it would extend underground mining operations in the town until at least 2020.

The meeting in the Waihi Memorial Hall will start at 11am.

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